

Senator John Breaux, Chairman
Special Committee on Aging
Opening Statement

Today's hearing is the second in a series on long-term care option for seniors and the disabled. The first hearing that we held last month with Tommy Thompson, Secretary of Health and Human Services, highlighted the Medicaid bias toward institutional care and efforts by the Department to shift funding away from institutional care and toward home and community based services.

Trying to shift Medicaid funds from institutional care to home and community based care may be as difficult as turning an ocean liner around, but we have to try. The 77 million baby boomers do not want to live in nursing homes when they are older and will strenuously resist leaving their homes to live in nursing homes. We are racing against a clock to develop other alternatives for baby boomers so they may "age in place."

Today we will hear from expert witnesses on the status of long-term care in the states. Some states have been aggressive in implementing the Olmstead decision and in creating a wide array of services for disabled citizens have created similar options for low-income seniors. Other states, like Louisiana, have not taken advantage of waivers available through the Department of Health and Human Services. Because most long-term care services are delivered through Medicaid and the states and federal government share in this funding stream, it is critical that we listen to what our witnesses have to say today so we can learn what is working well, what is working not so well and listen to suggestions for improvement by the federal government.

I now turn to Senator Craig for his comments.